

Administration of Barack Obama, 2013

Remarks on the Appointment of Denis R. McDonough as White House Chief of Staff

January 25, 2013

Good afternoon, everybody, and welcome to the announcement of one of the worst kept secrets in Washington. [*Laughter*]

As President, I rely on an extraordinary team of men and women here at the White House every single day. And I rely on my Chief of Staff to keep up with them—and our entire Government—making sure that we're all moving in the same direction, making sure that my priorities are being carried out and that our policies are consistent with the commitments that I've made to the American people and that we're delivering progress to the American people. As I said earlier this month, I could not be more grateful to Jack Lew for his amazing service, first as our OMB Director, then at the State Department, and ultimately, as my Chief of Staff.

As he prepares for his confirmation hearings and the challenge of leading our Treasury Department, I am pleased to announce my next Chief of Staff—and a great friend to me and everybody who works here at the White House—Mr. Denis McDonough.

Now, I have been counting on Denis for nearly a decade, since I first came to Washington, when he helped set up my Senate office. Along with Pete Rouse, he was able to show me where the restrooms were and how you passed a bill. [*Laughter*] I should point out that even then, Denis had gray hair. I've been trying to catch up to him—[*laughter*—but at that time, I relied on his intellect and his good judgment, and that has continued ever since. He's been one of my closest and most trusted advisers, on my Presidential campaign, on my transition team.

He has been an indispensable member of my national security team as well. Denis has played a key role in every major national security decision of my Presidency, from ending the war in Iraq to winding down the war in Afghanistan, from our response to natural disasters around the world like Haiti and the tsunami in Japan, to the repeal of "don't ask, don't tell," to countless crises in between—day and night, and that includes many nights. I've actually begun to think that Denis likes pulling all-nighters. [*Laughter*] The truth is nobody outworks Denis McDonough.

And part of the reason you saw such warmth of applause is that, in addition to being an incredible talent and such a hard worker, Denis is also a pretty humble guy. To so many of his friends and admirers, he's still just the "dude" from Stillwater, Minnesota. [*Laughter*] And given his humility, I don't think people always appreciate the breadth of his experience and the range of his talents. And it's precisely because of that intellect, that experience, his dedication, his determination, that I wanted Denis in this job.

As a veteran of Capitol Hill, where he was mentored by the likes of Lee Hamilton and Tom Daschle, Denis understands the importance of reaching across the aisle to deliver results for the American people, whether it's on jobs and the economy, health care or education, reducing the deficit or addressing climate change.

Denis is respected by leaders across our Government. Add it all up, and I think he's spent most of the past 4 years leading interagency meetings: hearing people out, listening to them, forging consensus, and then making sure that our policies are implemented and that everybody is held accountable. And he always holds himself accountable first and foremost. And it's no

easy task, but through it all, Denis does it with class and integrity and thoughtfulness for other people's point of views. He is the consummate public servant. He plays it straight. And that's the kind of teamwork that I want in the White House.

Time and again, I've relied on Denis to help in our outreach to the American people as well, including immigrant and minority communities and faith communities. Denis is a man of deep faith, and he understands that in the end, our policies and our programs are measured in the concrete differences that they make in the lives of our fellow human beings and in the values that we advance as Americans.

Denis insists on knowing for himself the real-world impact of the decisions that we make. So away from the cameras, without a lot of fanfare, he's visited our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan repeatedly, hearing their concerns, finding out what they need, and then making sure to follow up. He travels to Walter Reed—again, without fanfare—to spend time with our wounded warriors, getting to know them and what we as a nation can do to take care of them and their families. And then he comes back here to the White House, and he gets it done. And that's the kind of focus, but also the kind of heart, that I want in this White House.

Now, don't get me wrong, Denis can be tough. It probably comes from being one of eleven children: You've got to be tough. *[Laughter]* Two of his sisters are here today, by the way, Mary and Anna. And I know they could—they're just beaming. *[Laughter]* They could not be more proud of their brother. Maybe it comes from his college football days as defensive back under the legendary John Gagliardi. I always tease Denis that he made up for modest talents with extraordinary dedication and a high threshold for pain. *[Laughter]* This does remind me of perhaps the one topic on which Denis and I will never agree, and that is Vikings versus Bears.

There's another reason we all love Denis so much, and that's his decency, his respect for those around him. Ask any of the staff who are here today, and they'll tell you that despite the unbelievable pressures of service at this level, Denis is still the first to think about a colleague or to write a handwritten note saying thank you or to ask about your family. That's the spirit that I want in this White House.

And this, of course, is reflected in his incredible love for his own family: Kari, Addie, Liam, Teddy. I know that Dad has been at work a lot during the week and on weekends, but—and I guarantee he'd much rather be with you than with me. *[Laughter]* The next job that he's going to have is going to be demanding too, but the one reason he does this is because he wants to make sure that this world is a better place for all of you. Dad will probably have to stop riding his bike to work. As Chief of Staff, I don't think that's allowed. *[Laughter]* But he does what he does because he cares and loves you guys so much and he wants to make sure that the next generation is inheriting the kind of America that we all want. So I'm grateful to the entire McDonough family for putting up with us.

Denis, you're not just one of my closest friends, but you're also one of my closest advisers, and like everybody here, I cannot imagine the White House without you. Thank you for signing up for this very, very difficult job, as Jack Lew will testify. *[Laughter]* I know you'll always give it to me straight, as only a friend can, telling me not only what I want to hear, but more importantly, what I need to hear to make the best possible decisions on behalf of the American people.

So for me, for Michelle, for all your friends and colleagues who are here today, thank you for taking this assignment. Congratulations. *[Applause]*

I just have one other thing to add. We made a number of personnel announcements today. There is going to be an incredible team that Denis will help lead. But I thought I'd take the occasion to just embarrass somebody. Some of you may know that today is David Plouffe's last day in the White House. [Laughter] I had to hide this in the end of my remarks because I knew he wouldn't want me to bring it up. So we had some secret squirrel stuff going on here to avoid him thinking that we were going to talk about him. [Laughter]

But as many of you know, David has been with me from the very start of this enterprise running for President. I can't tell you how lucky I have been to have him manage our campaign back in 2008, then join the White House during these very challenging last 2 years. He's built a well-deserved reputation as being a numbers genius and a pretty tough combatant when it comes to politics. But what people don't always realize, because he doesn't like to show it, is the reason he does this stuff is because he cares deeply about people. And he cares about justice, and he cares about making sure that everybody gets a shot in life. And those values have motivated him to do incredible things, and were it not for him, we would not have been as effective a White House and I probably wouldn't be here.

So I thought it was worthwhile for us just to say, even if he doesn't want us to say it, thank you to David Plouffe for his—[inaudible].

Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:13 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former Rep. Lee H. Hamilton; former Sen. Thomas A. Daschle; John P. Gagliardi, former head football coach, Saint John's University; and Kari McDonough, wife of Mr. McDonough, and their children Addie, Liam, and Teddy.

Categories: Appointments and Nominations : White House Chief of Staff, appointment, remarks.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Daschle, Thomas A.; Gagliardi, John P.; Hamilton, Lee H.; Lew, Jacob J. "Jack"; McDonough, Addie; McDonough, Denis R.; McDonough, Kari; McDonough, Liam; McDonough, Teddy; Obama, Michelle; Plouffe, David A.; Rouse, Peter M.

Subjects: Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : "Don't ask, don't tell" policy, repeal; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Casualties; Haiti : Earthquake, damage and recovery efforts; Iraq : U.S. and coalition forces, withdrawal; Japan : Earthquake and tsunami, damage and recover efforts; Treasury, Department of the : Secretary-designate; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Chief of Staff; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Counselor; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: National Security Adviser, Deputy; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Senior Adviser.

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